

A NOTE ON THE CORVÉE SYSTEM (VEṬHBEGĀR) IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY MARATHA KINGDOM*

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I. Introduction

Since the late Prof. D. D. Kosambi introduced a concept of feudalism in the study of Indian history,¹ several Indian historians have started serious works in terms of the 'feudal' structure of Indian society and state roughly from the 6th century onward, and many aspects of the structure seem to have been clarified for the period up to the Muslim conquest. Prof. R. S. Sharma, for instance, has pointed several characteristics consisting of feudalism in Indian history, such as the grant of lands to Brahmans and later to princes and bureaucrats, sub-infeudation of lands, existence of peasants as semi-serfs, excessive burden of taxation and imposition of forced labour upon them and so on.²

Other historians of India who have likewise stressed certain feudalism in Indian polity during early medieval period usually point out the existence of forced labour as one of the important aspects of the feudalism.³ Indeed writers on Indian polity before the Muslim conquest almost always refer to a system of forced labour called *viṣṭi* prevalent there.⁴

On the other hand those scholars who have tried to prove the feudal structure of the political and economic life of India before the Muslim period do not always clearly express their opinion as to whether the Indian polity during later medieval period extending from the 13th to the early 19th century could also be characterized by a concept of feudalism, although the late Prof. Kosambi has certainly affirmed the point.⁵

Discussion in the light of a concept of feudalism has hardly started regarding the later medieval period of Indian history though some scholars like James Tod regarded long ago

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¹ D. D. Kosambi: *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956, Chaps. 9 & 10.

² R. S. Sharma: *Indian Feudalism: c. 300-1200*, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 263-67. See also R. Coulborn: "Feudalism, Brahminism, and the Intrusion of Islam upon Indian History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. X, No. 3, April, 1968, Mouton Publishers, pp. 356-74.

³ e.g. L. Gopal: *The Economic Life of Northern India*, Varanasi, 1965, pp. 26-28. S. A. Q. Husaini: *The Economic History of India*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1962, pp. 167-68. B. P. Mazumdar: *Socio-Economic History of Northern India (1030-1194 A. D.)*, Calcutta, 1960, pp. 188-90.

⁴ S. K. Maity: *The Economic Life of Northern India in Gupta Period (Cir. A. D. 300-550)*, Calcutta, 1957, pp. 152-54. U. N. Ghoshal: *Hindu Revenue System*, Calcutta, 1929, pp. 39, 40, etc.

⁵ D. D. Kosambi: *op. cit.*, pp. 338 ff.

the structure of Rajput states in Rajasthan as a specific kind of feudalism,⁶ whereas some historians like Dr. Irfan Habib seem cautiously to avoid any use of it.

Whether the later medieval Indian polity is to be understood in terms of a concept of feudalism or something else, some scholars have pointed out the then wide prevalence of corvée requisitioned by political authorities from subjects in various parts of India,⁷ along with exactions of regular revenues, tributes, and miscellaneous dues. But to the best of my knowledge the exact position of this custom of forced labour has not yet been studied for any part of India during the period.

Accordingly this paper of mine is an attempt at exposing the position of forced labour as it was practiced in the directly administered regions (*svarājya*) of the 18th century Maratha Confederacy on the basis of about fifty contemporary records collected from various Marathi source-books that will be duly indicated in the footnotes.

This paper will focus an attention among others firstly on the relationship between the forced labour and the caste system, and secondly on the freedom of people to migrate in the light of exactions of revenue, and so on.

Now before starting discussion a few remarks should be made regarding miscellaneous points connected with the topic.

First, the corvée as practiced in the 18th century Maratha *svarājya* was called either *begār* (a Persian term), or *veṭh* (derived from Sanskrit *viṣṭi*), or compound of the two terms *veṭhbegār*.

Second, about fifty records referred to above extend from 1720 to 1787 and cover all the major regions of *svarājya*;⁸ hence they show the wide prevalence of the practice in the kingdom.

Third, the corvée shown in the source materials is that which was exacted from villages, and it is not clear whether cities distinct from villages also bore the regular forced service.

Fourth, not all the people who did not participate in state power were imposed with the forced service. For instance, not only priestly Brahmins⁹ but also secular ones¹⁰ (e.g. land-owners) were exempted from it by the government. Besides, Kāsārs (Brassworkers) of Saswad region to the south of Poona were also permanently exempt from forced service, though the reason is not clear.¹¹ Other temporary exemption or reduction of it for some specific reasons will be mentioned later.

Fifth, the *svarājya* included temporarily assigned villages (*mokāśā*, *jāgīr*, *saranjām*, etc.) to state bureaucrats as well as permanently alienated villages (*inām*) to Deshmukh (hereditary chief of Pargana), Deshpande (hereditary accountant of Pargana), important temples, eminent

⁶ J. Tod: *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, London, 1st ed., 1829-32, reprint 1950, Vol. I, "Sketch of a Feudal System in Rajasthan."

⁷ e.g. J. N. Sarkar: *Mughal Administration*, 4th ed., Calcutta, 1952, p. 88. I. Habib: *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, Asia Publishing House, 1963, pp. 150, 167, 239. K. P. Mitra: "Begar or Forced Labour in Historical Records," *Proceedings of Indian Historical Records Commission*, Vol. XXIV, Jaipur, 1948, pp. 26-27.

⁸ Regional distribution of the records is as follows: eleven records for Poona, ten for Junnar, eight for Ahmadnagar, six for Konkan, five for Ratnagiri, three for Bassein, two each for Nasik and Satara, one each for Khandesh, Aurangabad, Sholapur and Dharwar.

⁹ G. C. Vād & D. B. Parasnis ed.: *Selections from the Satara Raja's and the Peshwa's Diaries* (abbreviated as SSRPD in the subsequent notes), Vol. II, No. 328, Poona, 1906.

¹⁰ Ibid., Vol. III, No. 341.

¹¹ Ibid., Vol. I, No. 281.

priests, distinguished servants of the state and so on. And such villages may have occupied about a quarter of the total number of the villages in the *svarājya*.¹² At any rate they were usually exempt from forced labour to the state, but were bound to bear it for the sake of fief-holders or *inam*-holders as will be occasionally referred to later.¹³

And sixth, the general aspects of revenue system in this kingdom have been studied by Prof. S.N. Sen¹⁴ and this paper will make a mention of it only when necessary. It should be borne in mind here that peasants had to pay the government a heavy land revenue sometimes amounting to the probably highest rate of two-thirds of gross-produce.¹⁵ Besides artisans and merchants residing in villages not to speak of towns and cities had to pay the government business-tax called *mohatarfa*, and both peasants and village-artisans were bound to bear beyond those regular revenue and tax various small dues in kind or in cash to government, local bureaucrats (such as Māmlēdārs, Kamāvisdārs and Khots), as well as to the indigenous hereditary officers like Deshmukhs and Desphandes. In other words corvée was exacted not in lieu of but in addition to such regular collections, usually in the peasants' slack season from October to March.

II. Corvée and Caste System

We will first examine kinds and amounts of forced labour and then try to find out connection between it and caste system on the basis of thirty records out of fifty, which are rather concrete in their contents.

Kinds of Corvée

The thirty records may be itemized on the basis of various kinds of services as follows:

- Item A. Seven records pertaining to corvée exacted for construction or repair of forts (*killā*), police-stations (*thānā*), residences of local bureaucrats, as well as the dams (*dharan*) for irrigation.
- Item B. Six records regarding portorage (*hajir begār*) of grains, timbers and other goods of government.
- Item C. Five records pertaining to corvée in cutting fodders (*gavat*) at government meadows (*sarkārchā kuran*) scattered in various places.
- Item D. Five records concerned with miscellaneous labour (*rābanāk* or *rābate*) at the local as well as the central government offices.
- Item E. Two records related to miscellaneous labour and saddlery at government stables

¹² In Ahmadnagar Collectorate, for instance, there were 527 assigned villages out of total 2647 villages at the commencement of British period. *Inām* villages numbered at 156.5. Thus assigned villages and *inām* ones occupied about 20% and 6% respectively of the total number of villages in the Collectorate. Vide W. Chaplin: *A Report Exhibiting a View of the Fiscal and Judicial System of Administration Introduced into the Conquered Territory above the Guts, under the Authority of the Commissioner in the Dekhan*, Bombay, 1824, reprint 1877, p. 17.

¹³ For *mokāsā* villages see SSRPD, Vol. II, No. 284; Vol. III, No. 334; and for *inām* villages see *ibid.*, Vol. II, No. 285; Vol. VIII, Nos. 1090, 1091. S. L. Vaidya ed.: *Vaidya Daftarāntūn Nivadlele Kāgad* (abbreviated as *Vaidya Daftar* in the subsequent notes), Vol. V (1752-53), No. 2, Poona, Shaka 1873.

¹⁴ S. N. Sen: *Administrative System of the Marathas*, Calcutta, 1923 (2nd ed. 1925), Book II, Chaps. V & VI. This book, however, does not refer to the forced labour.

¹⁵ SSRPD, Vol. III, Nos. 327, 334.

(*hujār pāgā*).

Item F. One record on free service of watchmanship (*baithak vēṭhbegār* or *choki vēṭhbegār*) at market places (*bājār*).

Item G. Four records on forced labour in *inām* villages; three of them on construction of houses and one on portorage for the sake of *ināmdār*.

Above itemization clearly shows that government imposed various kinds of forced labour upon the people both in the centre and in the countryside. It also may suggest that corvée was hardly used for the cultivation of state lands as well as the directly managed lands or demesne of *ināmdār* in his *inām* villages,¹⁶ such lands being usually cultivated by sharecroppers (*vātekari*, *ardheli*, etc.) or on a fixed rent.¹⁷

Amounts of Corvée

The amount of corvée requisitioned for construction and repair of forts and so on in Item A does not seem to have been pre-fixed for each village per annum. Rather government seems to have pressed people into service for required periods such as eight days or fifteen days¹⁸ whenever it was needed unless it disturbed their occupations.¹⁹ Case was the same with forced labour exacted by the holder of an *inām* village from his villagers in Item G above.²⁰

In the case of portorage as shown in Item B, also, there seems to have been no fixed rule for its amount; people were pressed into service by central as well as local government as occasion called for, though it seems that villagers of a certain village were not engaged in the service continuously for a long distance, but hands were changed at the next village.²¹

In the case of free service to cut fodders for government, amount of the annual (*sālābād*) obligation appears to have been fixed for each district and then for each village (probably from 10,000 to 50,000 bundles per year per village depending on the size of the village).²² And villagers probably used to spend about fifteen days every year for cutting the fixed amount of fodders²³ and had to carry them to appointed nearby stable of the government.²⁴

In the case of miscellaneous labour at central and local government offices as shown in

¹⁶ In this kingdom a part of the village lands was often given in *inām*, apart from *inām* villages. In my knowledge there is only instance in Junnar region where the cultivation of such an *inām* land in a village was carried out by means of forced labour of the villagers. In this case, though it is not clear who was the *ināmdār*, villagers cultivated the *inām* land by corvée in addition to free contribution of 17,000 bundles of fodders to government, which admitting the excessive exaction of forced labour exempted them from the fodder-contribution for a year. Vide SSRPD, Vol. II, No. 285.

¹⁷ Regarding the cultivation of state land and *inām* land by the tenants, see my essay: "Lands and Peasants in the Eighteenth Century Maratha Kingdom," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics*, Vol. 6, No. 1, June 1965, pp. 52-54, 56-60.

¹⁸ SSRPD, Vol. II, No. 286.

¹⁹ Government postponed or reduced the requisition of such forced labour during the busy farming season. Vide *ibid.*, Vol. VIII, No. 1088.

²⁰ *Vaidya Daftar*, op. cit., Vol. IV, (1741) No. 17; (1745) No. 4.

²¹ SSRPD, Vol. I, No. 365; Vol. III, No. 412; Vol. VIII, No. 1090.

²² *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, No. 741. But the obligation of a certain village, for example, was so changed from 14,000 bundles in the year 1763 to 13,500 bundles ten years later that annual burden of each village may have varied according to the change in the size of its population, for instance. Vide *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, No. 1087.

²³ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, No. 288.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, No. 1089.

Item D, the required amount of labour was not fixed beforehand; duration of service varied from fifteen days²⁵ to two months²⁶ per annum in different regions.

The period of service in miscellaneous labour and saddlery at government stables as shown in Item E is only mentioned as 'per last year' (*sālgujastapramāṇen*).²⁷ But as we shall point out later, service of this item was borne by the same castes (*jāti*) as that Item D referred to above, so that we may say that the duration of forced labour in Item E was also from fifteen days to two months per annum.

Amount of corvée in watchmanship at market places as referred to in Item F is by no means clear.

At any rate it should be borne in mind that excepting Item G concerned with *inām* villages, the duration of service such as eight days, fifteen days or two months as shown above was that which central government demanded or sanctioned. As a matter of fact, more arbitrary exaction of forced labour was often practiced by local authorities, and people faced with the excessive demand of corvée sometimes petitioned to central government to reduce or stop it or simply ran away. What central government would do on such occasions will be referred to later.

Corvée and Caste System

Here we will begin with the corvée in portage (Item B) and cutting fodders (Item C). People who were engaged in such services are simply called either 'forced labourers' (*begāri*, *veṭhī*, *veṭhbegāri*), 'men' (*asāmi*), or *rayat* (or *rayet*) in our records. As is known, the term *rayat* means 'people' or 'subjects' in general and 'peasants' in particular: at any rate it is not the name of any specific caste. Accordingly we may infer that the corvée in portage and cutting fodders was not imposed upon any specific castes but upon the villagers as a whole whose main body is peasantry.

On the other hand, it is not clear what kind of people bore the service of watchmanship at market places (Item F).

The situation in regard to construction and repair (Items A and G), miscellaneous labour at government offices (Item D) and miscellaneous labour and saddlery at stables (Item E) is, however, very remarkable in connection with caste system. In these items certain specific castes are clearly pointed out in the records as those who have been requisitioned in the different services: Sutārs (Carpenters), Kumbhārs (Makers of pots and bricks), Pātharvats (Masons), and Gavandi (Bricklayers) along with the forced labourers (*veṭhis*) and *rayats* in the case of construction and repair of buildings and dams (Items A and G)²⁸; Mahārs (untouchable caste engaged in miscellaneous menial labour such as sweeping the dirt and removing the dead animals, and so on) in the case of miscellaneous labour (*rabanāk* or *rābate*) at government offices (Item D) and stables (Item E)²⁹; and Chanhārs (untouchable caste occupied with leather works), Māngs (untouchable caste of rope-makers), and Jingars (untouchable caste specializing in making bridles and saddles among the leather works) in

²⁵ Ibid., Vol. VI, No. 723.

²⁶ Ibid., Vol. III, No. 334.

²⁷ Ibid., Vol. III, No. 265; Vol. VI, No. 673.

²⁸ Ibid., Vol. II, Nos. 196, 286; Vol. III, No. 315. *Vaidya Daftar*, Vol. IV, (1741) No. 17, (1743) No. 17, (1745) No. 4. R. V. Oturkar ed.: *Peshvekāln Sāmājik va Ārthik Patravayavahār*, Poona, 1950, No. 89.

²⁹ SSRPD, Vol. II, No. 283; Vol. III, Nos. 265, 334, 415; Vol. VI, Nos. 673, 723.

the case of saddlery at government stables (Item E).³⁰ In these items not only the names of specific castes are mentioned but also the number of persons to be requisitioned from each district or from each village is also often specified in our records.

The fact that various artisan castes and untouchable ones were regularly pressed into forced service in their respective traditional occupations by the government or by the privileged holders of villages either in fief or in *inām* suggests an important role played by caste system in the total polity of Maratha Kingdom: the caste system did not only maintain a considerable self-sufficiency of services *inside* the village, but also was closely connected with and utilized by the authorities through the system of forced labour.³¹

III. *Corvée and Freedom of People*

Basic Attitude of Government towards Corvée

People who bore all these burdens were necessarily to be protected by central government. And in fact the government seems to have always been cautious to see to it that people should not be 'harassed' (*upadrav*) or 'abscond' (*parāgandā*) because of excessive demand of revenue, *corvée* and so on. But the demand of *corvée* by local bureaucrats and their subordinates tended to be so heavy that people sometimes resorted to absconding. In such cases the central government would command the local bureaucrats to reduce the demand down to the customary standard and levy the *corvée* only so much as required for the government works and with a due consent of hereditary officers of the place.³² And on the other hand government would order the headman of the village to induce those who had absconded to come back to their village.³³ There were such cases also that when people in a service of portage ran away on the way, the government imposed a certain amount of money upon their village and employed wage-labourers (*majūrdār*) in their stead.³⁴ Even when people did not run away but simply complained about excessive demand of *corvée*, government would accept the appeal and allow the people to pay a certain amount of money in lieu of the *corvée*,³⁵ although such a measure does not seem to have become perpetual but rather appear to have reverted to ordinary provision of labour after some years.³⁶

Government did not only occasionally allow the money-payment of *corvée*, but also specially reduced or cancelled the *corvée* of the year from those masons, bricklayers and so on, who were then incidentally employed in the construction of some donated temple, as well as from such villages as had been recently damaged by the army or had just entered the busy agricultural season.³⁷

Moreover, not all the *corvée* was unpaid: people requisitioned in miscellaneous labour,

³⁰ Ibid., Vol. III, No. 265; Vol. VI, No. 673.

³¹ cf. My essay: "State and Caste System (Jāti) in the Eighteenth Century Maratha Kingdom," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics*, Vol. 9, No. 1, June 1968, p. 44.

³² "...veth bigār sarkārkāmās agatyāgatya lāgel, ti jamindārāche gujāratīṇeṣh shist karūn gheṇeṣh" (SSRPD, Vol. VI, No. 716). Also *ibid.*, Vol. VI, No. 723.

³³ Ibid., Vol. VI, No. 735; Vol. VII, Nos. 429, 431.

³⁴ Ibid., Vol. VIII, No. 1092.

³⁵ Ibid., Vol. II, No. 283; Vol. VII, No. 741; Vol. VIII, No. 1089.

³⁶ Ibid., Vol. II, No. 283; Vol. III, No. 415.

³⁷ Ibid., Vol. II No. 196; Vol. VIII, Nos. 999, 1087, 1088.

at least, were sometimes provided with a small amount of money or grains by the government.⁸⁸

In short it seems that the *principle*, as it were, of the central government was not to exact as much corvée from the people as possible but to impose it upon them 'properly' (*shist*), namely 'according to the custom' (*shirastpramāṇen*) and to that extent to which central government demanded or sanctioned.⁸⁹

Freedom of People

As pointed out above, when people ran away due to some grievances, government tried to induce them to come back. Then were the people *legally* bound to a certain fixed region or village? Or were they able to migrate to other places on their own will even in opposition to the wish of the government?

To be sure I have not been able to find any evidence to show that people actually migrated to other places merely because of the excessive demand of corvée. There are, however, several interesting records which show that people migrated *en masse* to other places due to a difference of revenue burden among different regions. Out of them the most informative will be translated as follows:

The Secretariat (Chitnisi) of Poona government issued following order to a bureaucrat posted at Nasik District in December 1779.

"Govind Ram, the Governor (Mamledar) of Kalyān Bhivandī District reported early this year to government as follows, 'Whereas in the regions of Deher Gorath and Korakdā of Kalyān Bhivandī District, survey (*pāhani*) was done in the suhūr year 1172 (=1771 A.D.), and Trinbak Vināyak (name of an officer) settled the revenue (*jamābandi*), peasants (*kulen*) so surveyed have however left for the regions of Trinbak and Ratangad (of Nasik District), so that the above two regions (of Kalyān Bhivandī) became ruined, and a loss to government took place.' Accordingly government already issued following letter to you, 'Send back above peasants to their respective regions, or collect the revenue (*dhara*) from these peasants in your own regions according to the rate that would be fixed by the Governor of Kalyān.' Nevertheless you did not do so, but simply issued a letter to your own Collectors (*Kamāvisdars*) to the effect that peasants should be sent back if they so agreed (*rajāband*). Therefore officers subordinate to Governor (*Mamledar*) of the above District (Kalyān Bhivandī) have again petitioned to the government as follows, 'Why would the peasants agree to come back, for those peasants who had been cultivating land here at the rate of Rs. 50 are cultivating the same amount of land there at the rate of Rs. 25? When the said peasants newly migrated there the Collectors of the places easily issued assurance knowing that they (Collectors) would also be benefited. Then how would the peasants agree to come back?... Therefore please issue an order on this matter.' Accordingly this order-letter is issued to you. When some ones come there to take those peasants back to their respective regions who have migrated from two regions of the above District (Kalyān Bhivandī) to your regions, issue a strict order (*takid*) to them to be taken back. If the peasants do not want to go back, collect revenue (*vasul*) from each one of them according to what Governor of Kalyān will fix as the assessment upon the peasants on the basis of the survey done in suhūr

⁸⁸ Ibid., Vol. II, No. 282; Vol. VI, No. 723.

⁸⁹ Ibid., Vol. III, No. 421. Oturkar: *Peshvekalin Sāmājik va Ārthik Patravayavahār*, op. cit., Nos. 6, 88.

year 1172. You must not cause the complaint to occur again on this matter."⁴⁰

The record translated above fairly clearly shows at least following two points. First, people⁴¹ could migrate to other areas if they wanted to do so, even against the will of government. In other words they were not *de jure* bound to a certain specific area or village, but had a freedom of migration *in principle* so far as they performed their duty of paying revenue and so on to the authorities. More generally speaking, it appears that there was no legal status of *serfs* in this kingdom, all the people being free in principle excepting slaves who were unfree *de jure* as well as *de facto*.⁴² Second, above record shows, however, that both central government and local bureaucrats obstinately desired to promote the people to return to the areas or the villages wherefrom they had absconded.

Why did not government leave the people to migrate and satisfy itself with taking the revenue and so on from them at the new place wherein they had settled? Why did it so strongly demand them to return?

There seem to have been two major reasons for that. The first lay in the systems of revenue collection of this kingdom. Broadly there were two systems of revenue collection; collection through formal Collectors (*Kamāvisdārs*) and that through revenue Farmers (*Khots*). In the *khoti* system, when farmers were unable to collect the contracted amount of revenue due to absconding of peasants or some other reasons, they were obliged to 'fill up' (*bharṇen*) the deficiency on their own account unless they were specifically exempted from it by government.⁴³ In the case of *kamāvisdāri*, though the Collectors were not always obliged to fill up the deficiency from their own pockets, yet they were usually bound to pay the government in advance a considerable portion of the revenue to be collected from their jurisdiction, and the remuneration for them also often consisted of a certain proportion of the revenue

⁴⁰ Ibid., Vol. VI, No. 744. "Pargaṇe Deher Gorath va Tāluke Korakdā, Prānt Kalyān Bhivandī, yethil san isnain sabainānt pāhanī hoūn, Trimbak Vināyak yānnīn jāmābandī tharaulī, tyā pāhanīntil kulēn, Trimbak va Ratangad Tālukyānt gelīn āhet, yājmuleṇ he donhī mahāl kharāb padon sarkār nuksān jālēn, heṇ vartmān sālmajkulīn Govind Rām Māmledār, Prānt majkur, yānnīn sarkārānt nivedan kelen, tyājvarūn tuhmāns patreṇ sādār jālīn kīn, sadārḥū kulēn mahālche mahālīn pāthavṇeṇ, nāhīn tar tyā kulānchā dhārā Kalyānche Māmledār bāndhūn detil, tyāpramāṇeṇ tuhmīn āple Tālukiyākade jamā dharṇeṇ, aseṇ astān tyāpramāṇeṇ na kelen; āni tuhmīn āple kadil kamāvisdārāns patreṇ kulēn rajāband karūn netil tīn neūn deṇeṇ, yāpramāṇeṇ patreṇ dilhīn, tyās kulāche rajābandīchā prakār tarī, jeṇ kūl prānt majkurīn pannās rupayānchē jītkī jamīn karīt hoteṇ teṇ kūl tikde jāūn titkī jamīn panchvis rupayānt kariteṇ. ukteṇ kūl tikde naveṇ jāteṇ teṇ tikdīl kamāvisdārās naphyānt milteṇ, heṇ jānon sahal kaul detāt, tevhān kūl rāji hoūn kaseṇ yeil? donhī Tāluke sarkārche; yājkaritān yevishīn ādnyā jāli pāhije; hmanon Prānt majkūrche Māmledārākadil kārkunānnīn Hujūr vinantī keli, tyājvarūn heṇ patra sādār kelen ase, tarī Prānt majkūrche donhī mahālāntil kūl tuhmānkadil hardū tālukiyānt getīn āhet, tīn mahālche mahālīn āntil, tyāns tākid karūn laun deṇeṇ. kulēn yet naslīn tarī, isanneṇ pāhanī jāli āhe, tyāpramāṇeṇ Kalyānche Māmledār tyā kulāchi jamā bāndhūn detil, tyā bamojib kulāragavār jamā dharūn, vasūl gheṇeṇ. [ye] vishīnchā bobhāt phiron yeūn na deṇeṇ."

⁴¹ The record translated above refers to peasants (*kulēn*), but other records of similar purport are concerned with people in general (*rayat*), so that the above record may be understood to apply to the people in general. Vide *ibid.*, Vol. III, Nos. 372, 375.

⁴² On the position of male and female slaves in this kingdom who were employed mostly in domestic services in the courts and more or less well-to-do families, see my Japanese essay: "Gulām and Kunbīna in the 18th Century Maratha Kingdom," *The Hitotsubashi Review*, Vol. 45, No. 6, June 1961.

⁴³ SSRPD, Vol. VI, Nos. 716, 762.

assessed thereupon.⁴⁴ Therefore it was very important for either of them to cause as many people as possible to remain and work in their respective jurisdiction which was sometimes composed of a single village. The second reason is to be found in the vested interests held by indigenous privileged class called *hakkdārs* such as Deshmukhs, Deshpandes, Patils (hereditary headmen of villages), Kulkarnis (hereditary accountants of villages) as well as temples, priests and so on. All of them were entitled to receive a certain amount of produce from people of the region or the village.⁴⁵ Therefore it seems to have been necessary for the government to maintain and promote the settlement of the people in a certain specific area and village in order to protect the vested interests of the privileged class, whereas the government at the same time ought to have taken into consideration the welfare of the people as mentioned before.

Thus it may be said that *de jure* free status of ordinary people was *de facto* restricted more or less by the politico-economic interests of the ruling classes extending from village *hakkdārs* up to central government, and they were actually more or less bound to a certain specific region and village.

Mechanism for Enforcing the Corvée

In a government village as well as in an alienated one it was usually headman of the village (Patil) who was held responsible at the bottom of administrative hierarchy to maintain and promote the settlement of people and produce annual revenue, cesses and corvée from them.⁴⁶ Being always in the intermediate position between government authorities and people, he would complain to government of excessive demand of revenue and corvée, request it to reduce or exempt it,⁴⁷ and sometimes resort to absconding along with villagers.⁴⁸ On the other hand, however, it was he who would deal with local authorities and undertake to procure necessary corvée for them,⁴⁹ and indeed there were some patils who had their revenue-free land (*inām jamin*) augmented by government as a special reward for their distinguished service in providing it with required corvée.⁵⁰ But unfortunately we are unable at present to make it clear how the village headman allotted burden of corvée among his villagers.

⁴⁴ Though we can show a large number of records regarding the *kothi* and *kamāvisdāri* systems, suffice it here only to refer to *ibid.*, Vol. III, Nos. 406, 407, 427, 430; and also to S. N. Sen; *Administrative System of the Marathas*, op. cit., 1st ed., pp. 219-21.

⁴⁵ Although records on these privilege-holders are also large in number, suffice it here to refer to S. N. Sen: *ibid.*, pp. 183-95, 211-18; and also to S. N. Joshi: "Deshmukhi Watan," *Āitiḥāsik Sankirna Nibandh*, Vol. I, Poona, 1943, pp. 60-75; Do.: "Chaugulā," *ibid.*, Vol. II, Poona, 1947, pp. 28-33.

⁴⁶ Deshmukh and Deshpande, hereditary chief and accountant of a Pargana respectively, were not more than to help as well as check the local bureaucrats and were not *directly* responsible for collecting revenue etc. and requisitioning corvée in the 18th century Maratha *svarājya*. Vide S. N. Sen: op. cit., pp. 211-17; SSRPD, Vol. VI, Nos. 716, 723.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, No. 334; Vol. VI, No. 714.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, No. 372.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, No. 366; Vol. VI, No. 741.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, No. 366; Vol. VI, No. 741.

IV. Conclusion

Although the scope of our discussion has been limited to the 18th century Maratha *svarājya*, the following points among others may have been made fairly clear: First, there was a strong financial connection between Maratha polity and caste system through the regular requisition of forced labour from artisan and menial castes by the authorities. Second, the people had their *de jure* liberty of migration more or less restricted *de facto* by the government because of the specific revenue systems on the one hand and the vested interests of privileged class on the other. And third, the institution of village community was utilized by ruling powers as the compulsory mechanism for procuring revenue, cesses and corvée.

When Maratha *svarājya* was annexed to British territories in 1817-18, the basic principle of the government of East India Company was to do everything possible 'to reassure people concerning the new government.'⁶¹ As a result the government abolished corvée system to be used for government works, and in its stead levied from every government village a certain amount of money for fodders (*gavat begār*) and for miscellaneous labour (*rābanūk*).⁶² But corvée continued to be often requisitioned by low-class officers and soldiers of the government so that it had frequently to prohibit the abuse.⁶³ On the other hand, government connived at the exaction of forced labour by indigenous privileged class such as Deshmukhs, Deshpandes, *ināmdars*, and so on for a long period of years. It was in 1860 that the government formally prohibited all sorts of forced labour as practiced in British India. The India Penal Code enacted in the year declared, 'whoever unlawfully compels any person to labour against the will of that person, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.'⁶⁴ Although private exaction of forced labour seems to have been occasionally practiced even after the promulgation of the Code, we may still observe in the provision one of the important aspects of transition from medieval to modern period in Indian History.

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⁶¹ K. Ballhatchet: *Social Policy and Social Change in Western India, 1817-1830*, London, 1957, p. 10.

⁶² W. Chaplin: *A Report Exhibiting a View of the Fiscal and Judicial System of Administration etc.*, op. cit., pp. 139, 143.

⁶³ R. D. Choksey ed.: *Period of Transition (1818-1826)*, Poona, 1945, pp. 101, 102, 200-207.

⁶⁴ H. S. Gour: *The Penal Law of India*, Calcutta, 1910, Vol. II, Section 374, pp. 1453-54.